

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AGRE-00 EB-08 AID-05 PA-01 USIA-06

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MONROVIA FOR AGATT

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAGR, EPAP

SUBJECT: RICE SHORTAGE IN IVORY COAST

1. IN THE LAST MONTH, RICE HAS BEEN, AT TIMES, IN SHORT SUPPLY IN IVORY COAST. IN THE LAST FEW DAYS, THE SITUATION HAS BECOME NOTICEABLY WORSE AND RICE HAS COMPLETELY DISAPPEARED FROM LOCAL MARKETS. EVEN EXPENSIVE IMPORTED RICE SOLD IN EUROPEAN SUPERMARKETS HAS BEEN BOUGHT UP. THE CAUSES OF THIS SUDDEN SHORTFALL ARE NOT CLEAR, THUS MAKING IT IMPOSSIBLE TO GAUGAE THE SERIOUSNESS AND DURATION OF THE CRISIS. AS ALWAYS, THERE IS MUCH SPECULATION.

2. ONE RUMOR IS THAT WHOLESALERS AND MERCHANTS ARE HOARDING STOCKS IN THE BELIEF THAT SUPPORT PRICES ARE ABOUT TO BE RAISED. THIS SEEMS HIGHLY IMPROBABLE FOR TWO REASONS. FIRST OF ALL, THE PRICE OF RICE IS CURRENTLY SUPPORTED AT 100 CFAF/ KILO(ABOUT \$.18/LB) ALREADY WELL ABOVE THE WORLD MARKET PRICE. SECONDLY, IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT

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HOARDING WOULD BE SO WIDESPREAD AND SUDDEN TO DEplete RETAIL STOCKS IN SUCH A SHORT TIME. ANOTHER POSSIBILITY IS THAT THE DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM HAS TEMPORARILY BROKEN DOWN AND THAT THE ONLY PROBLEM IS GETTING RICE FROM STOREHOUSE TO MARKET. THIS THEORY ALSO HAS LITTLE CREDENCE AS THERE ARE NO INDICATIONS OF SUCH DISRUPTIONS AND NO APPARENT

REASON FOR THEM.

3. THE THIRD AND MOST LIKELY POSSIBILITY IS THAT IVORY COAST HAS JUST RUN OUT OF RICE, A SITUATION WHICH IS NOT ONLY SERIOUS BUT EMBARRASSING AS WELL. IT IS EMBARRASSING IN THAT IVORY COAST'S DRIVE TO ATTAIN SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN RICE HAS BEEN PROUNOUNCED SUCCESSFUL, AND INDEED SOME ESTIMATES CONTEND THAT 1976 PRODUCTION EXCEEDED DOMESTIC NEEDS. THE PROBLEM, HOWEVER, IS NOT THE PRODUCTION, BUT STORAGE AND MILLING FACILITIES. DODERIZ(THE GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY CONCERNED WITH RICE) HAS BEEN SO SUCCESSFUL IN INCREASING PRODUCTION THAT THEY NOW HAVE MUCH MORE THAN THEY CAN PROCESS AND STORE.

4. STORAGE FACILITIES ARE ALMOST NON-EXISTENT IN RICE-PRODUCING VILLAGES AND LARGE SILOS FOR LONG-TERM STORAGE ARE INADEQUATE--MANY ARE STILL UNDER CONSTRUCTION OR ON THE DRAWING BOARDS. MILLING FACILITIES ARE INADEQUATE AND ANTIQUATED MAKING IT IMPOSSIBLE TO PROCESS ALL DOMESTIC PRODUCTION. GIVEN THESE BOTTLENECKS, IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE TO RATIONALIZE TWO SEEMINGLY CONTRADICTORY FACTS. IVORY COAST HAS PRODUCED ENOUGH RICE FOR DOMESTIC PRODUCTION, BUT NOW HAS RUN OUT. BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF STORAGE FACILITIES, SOME OF THE PRODUCTION HAS BEEN LOST DUE TO ROT, INSECT INFESTATION, RATS AND OTHER FACTORS.
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5. WHATEVER THE REASON, THE SHORTAGE IS SERIOUS AND BECOMES MORE SO AS TIME GOES ON. RICE IS THE STAPLE FOR URBAN DWELLERS AND MANY IVORIANS EAT LITTLE ELSE. AVERAGE PER CAPITA CONSUMPTION RUNS AT ABOUT ONE-HALF POUND PER DAY. EVEN IF TASTES ALLOWED EASY SUBSTITUTION, OTHER TRADITIONAL FOODS LIKE IGNAME (YAM), CASSAVA, AND CORN ARE HIGHER IN PRICE THAN RICE AND LIKELY TO BECOME MORE EXPENSIVE IF DEMANDS FOR THEM INCREASE.

6. THE GOVERNMENT HAS APPARENTLY RECOGNIZED THE SERIOUSNESS OF HE PROBLEM, HAVING CALLED AN EMERGENCY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS ON APRIL 5 TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE ACTIONS. WHILE NO PLAN HAS YET BEEN MADE PUBLIC, ONE IS PROMISED IN THE NEAR FUTURE. STEARNS

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